A Review of Fire Fighting Services in the MetroWest Area

Introduction

The MetroWest Growth Management Committee (MetroWest) is a subregion of MAPC representing the communities of Ashland, Framingham, Marlborough, Natick, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley and Weston. At the request of MetroWest, and as a component of the subregional assistance program, MAPC collaborated with MetroWest in this review of fire services to determine whether or not there were opportunities for some or all of the communities to accomplish the following goals:

- Reduce operating cost;
- Create more effective methods of providing services and programs; and
- Enhance mutual aid and coordination with respect to equipment, personnel and training.

The report was intended to serve as a framework MetroWest could use to analyze the level of service currently provided by the nine individual fire departments and then review options and strategies that might improve the coordination of fire service within the area.

Although the initial request from MetroWest focused on the consolidation of fire services, the scope was later broadened to look at other cooperative agreements that could be initiated by the fire departments.

The purpose of this report is to stimulate discussion among decision-makers in MetroWest about how best to address the fiscal, service and political realities that face its fire departments. This report is a framework — a starting point for further analysis and exploring alternatives.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Intergovernmental cooperation can be defined as the process by which neighboring communities work together to solve problems and provide services for their residents and businesses. For many communities this type of cooperation has been an effective solution for reducing costs, eliminating duplicative services and improving efficiency in providing those services.

Intergovernmental cooperation can be accomplished by many methods including inter-jurisdictional agreements, contracts or consolidation of departments and services into a single provider.

Local Authority In Massachusetts

Chapter 40, Sec.4A of the General Laws authorizes towns and cities to participate in "joint operation of public activities. In accordance with this statute joint operation requires approval by a city council or town meeting thereby requiring a more formal arrangement than one simply ratified by the authority of the municipal executives. The statute permits joint contracting of any activities which towns individually have power to conduct. Two forms of such agreements are covered by the statute: those where two or more governments jointly perform an undertaking, such as sharing equipment or personnel, or engaging in joint purchasing programs; and those where one (or more) municipality carries out the services for the others.

The statute was amended in 1992, allowing participating communities to determine the length of the agreements, up to a maximum of 25 years, and the terms and conditions for addition and withdrawal of members. All means of financing available to individual municipalities can be used. The amended regulations can be found in **Attachment A.**